

Women's Southwest Backpacking - Adult

Course Description

Explore the mountains of the American Southwest on this course designed for adventurous women. Prepare yourself for a week of breathtaking beauty, hard work, fun, and companionship. Learn the basics of backpacking in one of the United States' most stunning and unique wilderness areas, developing leadership skills and forming new friendships along the way.

Features

- Duration: 8 days
- Route length: 25-35 miles
- Average group size: 10-14 students / 2-3 instructors
- Average age: 32 / Minimum age: 23
- Designed for those who self-identify as women
- Average pack weight: 40-50 pounds
- Elevation range: 5,500 - 9,000 feet
- On and off-trail hiking
- Skills: outdoor living and Leave No Trace camping and travel skills, hazard evaluation, judgment and decision-making, reading topographic maps and route finding
- Notable wildlife: birds, javelina, black bear, coyote, deer, desert bighorn sheep, mountain lion, rattlesnakes

Overview

This course takes place in the [Galiuro Wilderness](#) in Arizona on ancestral lands of O'odam Jewed, Ndee/Nnēē, Hohokam, and Sobaipuri. This range is considered one of many desert "sky islands," isolated pockets of sub-alpine vegetation and forest surrounded by barren desert basins. Here, you will be among manzanita, oak, juniper, and ponderosa pine while looking out over the stark desert below.

This course was designed for you to develop and practice backcountry living and traveling skills in the company of a motivated group. You'll begin with the basics—camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, and Leave No Trace techniques—skills that are the foundation for going on backpacking trips of your own. This course will challenge you with some long hiking days and off-trail navigation, and there will also be time for backcountry baking, and getting to know your classmates around a campfire.

You will learn the basic [NOLS leadership curriculum](#) and have the opportunity to put leadership skills into practice and contribute to the success of your team.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather

The Southwest is known to host extremes in temperature and weather conditions.

Though warm, mild weather is more typical, students should expect anything from monsoon rains and extreme heat to snow, wind, and subfreezing

temperatures. Sometimes these weather changes occur in a matter of minutes, other times storms or cold temperatures can last for days. Subfreezing temperatures are common, especially at night. Please make sure you bring the appropriate gear from our equipment list to help you keep warm in these conditions. There may be times when you are cold, wet and tired, but you'll learn to manage these situations. You might even find yourself smiling while you do. In time, your own adaptation to varied conditions will help you understand and appreciate the remarkable flora and fauna that make the Southwest such a special environment.

Terrain

All areas in which you will travel are rugged mountain ranges, characterized by deeply incised canyons, steep slopes, rocky terrain, and sheer cliffs. Travel in the backcountry can at times be exclusively off-trail, requiring constant attention to route-finding. The rock can be loose and easily breakable and the vegetation can be dense and is often thorny, adding to the challenge of hiking.

Remoteness

For the duration of your course, you'll be many miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be days away. All NOLS instructors maintain wilderness medicine certifications and are equipped with well-stocked first aid kits to provide care in the event of an emergency.

Wildlife

The Southwest is home to rattlesnakes and other potentially harmful reptiles, insects, and mammals. Various species of cactus and other plants with sharp spines can make it a challenge to move around. An important part of the curriculum is learning to be aware of your surroundings and being able to identify these hazards in order to reduce the chance of injury.

The area your course will travel through is home to black bears. NOLS, in collaboration with bear biologists, has developed specific practices to minimize the risk of a bear encounter. Your instructors will teach these practices to you and you will have to follow them every day. Bear avoidance practices may include carrying bear deterrent pepper spray, meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites, not having food in tents, and practicing proper food storage.

Water Scarcity

Water is the life-blood of the Southwest. Your hiking routes are typically designed to go from one water source to another. These water sources are either mountain streams, man-made “tanks,” or naturally occurring pools found deep in the clefts of rocks. Often water sources are many miles apart, and it may be necessary to carry a day’s supply of water between camps. The Southwest has been experiencing drought conditions over the past several years. If water shortage, or conversely, flooding, dictates a change, the location for any backcountry portion of this course might be moved to another wilderness area.

Group dynamics

You will be living and working in a small and diverse community around the clock in sometimes difficult conditions. This will require the utmost in cooperation, patience, and humility. The success of the expedition is dependent on the ability of its members to support one another in trying circumstances. On all of our courses, we strive to foster a course culture free from racism, sexism, xenophobia, classism, homophobia, and transphobia, and in which these and other hallmarks of systematic oppression do not impact anyone's ability to learn and thrive in the outdoors. Working together towards a common vision can be one of the most rewarding and memorable aspects of any NOLS course. This course provides the unique opportunity to spend time in an affinity space with adult women in an outdoor setting. This helps create a comfortable learning environment that supports asking questions, taking risks, and forming relationships.

Learning Goals at NOLS

NOLS courses teach wilderness and leadership skills on expeditions and in classrooms. You will apply these skills to challenges in a supportive learning culture with high expectations. Your course will provide you with the opportunity for a positive, transformative experience intended to inspire you and empower you to act.

We craft NOLS courses so graduates will be able to assume leadership roles; live and travel in the outdoors; act with confidence and competence; respect and collaborate with others on expeditions, on teams and in communities; care for themselves and

others; understand their strengths, habits, and areas for growth; function under difficult circumstances; make informed and thoughtful decisions; communicate effectively; connect with natural places; and appreciate living simply.

We believe positive, ethical leaders change the world. Join NOLS and become one of these leaders.